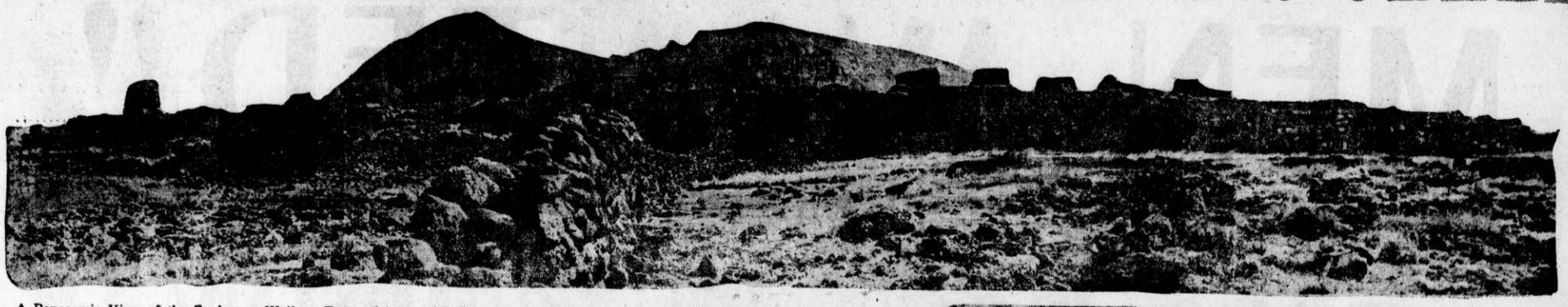
MYSTERIOUS EASTER ISLAND'S NEWEST PUZZLES



A Panoramic View of the Cyclopean Wall on Easter Island, with Some of the Enigmatic Images Lying Prostrate Upon It.

A Daring Woman Explorer's Remarkable Discoveries in the Most Perplexing Region on the Face of the Globe---Gigantic Half Buried Statues and Hieroglyphic Writings That May Hold the Secret of the World's First Civilization

By Dr. W. H. Ballou.

THE most extraordinary archaeological and ethnological problem in the whole world is that of Easter Island, a bit of land rising from the Pacific Ocean, two thousand miles from the South American coats, and with no stopping place between.

Easter Island contains the remains of a long vanished, prehistoric people. It has scores of colossal statues buried to their chins in earth or lying shattered on the ground. There is a great cliff from which these statues were quarried and in which some still remain unfinished, as if the makers' tools were dropped in whatever cataclysm it was that wiped the natives out.

Easter Island is an unread page in the history of human civilization. It is not blank, because not only are there these titanic remains, but because whoever the people were who lived there, they had a written language. This script is unlike anything known except Minos, itself an undecipherable writing used by the prehistoric civilization of Crete.

There are several theories as to the people who carved the statues. Some say that Easter Island was a ceremonial place for the aboriginal civilization of South America. Still others have contended that there may have been a land bridge of islands between the Peruvian coast and this place of statues. Now adding to its mysteries, Mrs. Scoresby Routledge, M. A., a very courageous English woman explorer, who has been three years on the island, tells of the new things she has found there.

Since its discovery on Easter Day, 1722, by the Dutch Admiral Roggeveen Easter Island has undergone considerable change, Mrs. Routledge found. The island, being of volcanic formation, there is very little wood on it which can be used for building purposes. Following the necessity of building shelters the Chilean ranch owners who came there constructed their huts of any stones they found convenient. It therefore requires an education of many months to know whether tumble-down stones are, for example, an old burial place or a ranch wall which has been allowed to fall to disuse.

All along the coast are a series of terraces, the native name for which is Ahu. The ranchmen have demolished these in order to use the material for constructing a sea wall. But even though the ancient and modern creations are in some cases inextricably mixed there are sufficient remaining ruins of the early islanders' work to baffle the efforts which have so far been made to learn the exact nature of the people who first inhabited the island.

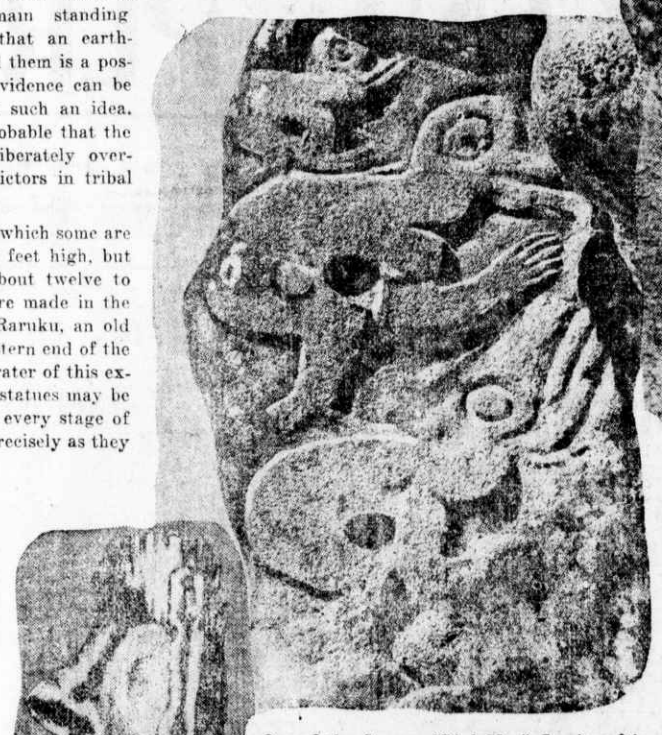
These terraces, in which the bones of the dead were buried, average about 300 feet in length and 8 to 14 feet in height. Some walls are comparatively rough in construction; in others the stones are beautifully wrought and fitted. The terrace usually consists of a centre wall with two wings, which are continuous with the centre, but slightly set back from the sea. On the top of the centre wall is a level platform on which the images used to stand. They had their backs to the sea and looked inland over the corpses and bones of the dead. None of the images remain standing The suggestion that an earthquake has leveled them is a possibility, but no evidence can be found to confirm such an idea. It seems more probable that the statues were deliberately overthrown by the victors in tribal wars.

One of the Mysterious "Writings" Found on Easter Island. The Symbols Are Entirely Unlike Any Other Written Language Known to Science.

The statues, of which some are more than thirty feet high, but which average about twelve to eighteen feet, were made in the quarry of Rano Raruku, an old volcano at the eastern end of the island. In the crater of this extinct volcano the statues may be seen by scores at every stage of completion, left precisely as they were when work was stopped and the workmen laid down their tools. Many of the images, no doubt, were intended to be moved to the terraces and means for carrying them have been discovered. But others certainly could never have been moved because of their enormous size.

But who were these people who carved out these images? Do the present inhabitants know anything of the origin of the great works? Speaking generally, the answer to this latter question is in the negative. There are several scraps of tradition and lore about the statue builders, but very little first-hand information can be obtained. The story which is universally told to account for the cessation of the work is as follows:

"The chief person among the image workers was the cook; she was an old woman of great authority, and moved the statues by a supernatural power. One day on returning to the mountain she found that during her absence the workers had had a great feast of lobster and that nothing had been left for her. So great was her wrath that she threw down the statues and brought the whole work to a conclusion."



Profile View of One of the Gigantic Images.

One of the Strange "Bird Men" Carvings Discovered by Mrs. Routledge.

The most striking differences between the statues and the present islanders are found in the hats, ears and inscriptions on the backs.

The hats are square brimmed and project far out over the forehead. The hats which the present natives wear suggest very faintly the hats on the statues. They are made of grass, are round, and have but a very narrow brim. No amount of questioning could bring forth an answer that would shed any light on the origin of the hats.

In the case of the ears we have a strong clue. The images, we can see, represent a race which artificially enlarged the lobe of the ear. Upon questioning the oldest inhabitants on this subject it was found that not since the coming of the white men had the male islanders forced their ears into such a form. The coming of the white men seems to have been, in the islanders' minds, about the end of the eighteenth century, when Captain Cook, the discoverer of the Hawaiian Islands, visited Easter Island.

The Inca nation in Peru, which was one of the most highly civilized tribes of the American aborigines, also had the custom of thus enlarging the ear lobe.

Can it be that civilization and learning traveled first from the American continent by way of the Pacific and then to Europe?

One of the Easter Island Images Half Excavated from the Earth in Which It Has Lain for Unknown Centuries.

This is the greatest of the new puzzles Easter Island affords.

The marks on the backs were easily distinguished as tattoo designs which the present day inhabitants still remember.

And now we come to the most amazing of the new mysteries. Hieroglyphic writings or writings of any form are absolutely unknown in the South Seas. Yet on Easter Island there have been found many fragments of tablets which contain markings that can be none else than a written language. At one time these tablets must have existed in great abundance, but they were ordered to be burned by the early missionaries as the works of the devil. Consequently, only sections of them remain.

The men who were able to read and write this language were all carried off by the Peruvian slave traders in 1864. One man still was alive on the island who began to learn the art, but his hand had shaken so that he had given up the attempt. He knew that beginners first practised on the side stem or bark of the banana tree, and then were promoted to write on wood with a shark's tooth.

But there was another kind of writing on the island. A man who was confined to a leper colony was able to write it. He said that writing could not be continued to the next line, but must be carried directly across the page. He recited a set of words to each symbol. The man died shortly afterward and put an end to further investigation of the system.

While knowledge of the statues and the writings has almost entirely disappeared, there is still a strong and clear living memory of another cult. This is the ceremony connected with the bird cult. The crater lake of the volcano Rano Kao forms the favorite nesting place for certain sea birds, and here in the Spring (September) comes a migratory bird whose native name is Manu Tara. The whole life of the island turned on who should be the fortunate man to obtain possession of the first egg of this bird.

The competitors for the egg were duly nominated by a medicine man or woman who dreamed that certain men were suitable in the eyes of the gods to find the egg.

The competitors did not as a rule enter on the actual search, but preferred to hire servants to take the egg from the bird. When the first egg was discovered the name of the finder's employer was shouted across the mainland from the highest point of the island. The happy winner immediately shaved his head and a fire was lighted on the mountain to inform the rest of the island that the egg was found.

At the foot of the mountain was a village at whose termination was a natural outcrop of rocks. These are the rocks of Orongo, on which symbols have been carved in every size and position. They are the figures which have bodies of men and heads of birds. It is almost certain that these carvings represent the bird-men of the different years.

These bird-men became holy. They were only allowed to be buried in the terraces or Ahus. It may, therefore, be surmised that the big statues from the image mountain which overlook the Ahus are also images of the bird-men.

The skulls of some of the older bird-men have been discovered and differ from the regular Polynesian skull and are much more like the people of the Malay peninsula.

Though Easter Island is still an enigma, we are beginning to see more and more the probability that civilization had its birth, not in the Caucasus mountains of Europe, but in the central portion of the South American continent.

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